

#### LIVE FROM THE SCENE

A Miraculous Prescription of Play

#### JUST FOR THE RECORD

Gaining Overseas Experiences to Elevate Local Service Standards



# HOSPITAL PLAY GAINS UNANIMOUS RECOGNITION ALL AROUND

Children have the right to play and their right should not be limited under any circumstances. Playright believes that hospitalized children should also enjoy the right to play because children should still play even when they get sick! Playright invited The Nethersole School of Nursing of the Faculty of Medicine of the Chinese University of Hong Kong to conduct research to understand the perceptions of healthcare professionals, hospitalized children, and parents regarding hospital play services with a view to reviewing the effectiveness of the services and the future direction of development.

The research was conducted from late 2023 to early 2024 in two phases. The first phase was a structured questionnaire in which 182 healthcare professionals from 6 public hospitals participated. The second phase was one-on-one interviews involving 20 healthcare professionals, 14 children who were previously hospitalized and 12 parents.

## **Extracts of Research Findings**





#### Scope of jobs

Provide psychological preparation for children and support for implementation of medical procedures

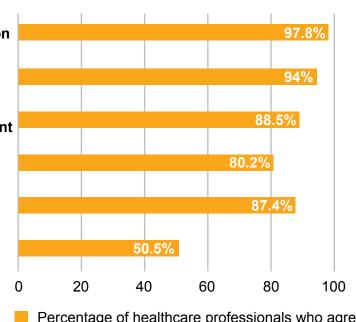
Provide skills to cope with stress

Hospital orientation and familiarization with hospital environment

Support paediatric patients' families

Provide leisure play

**Facilitate normalization** 



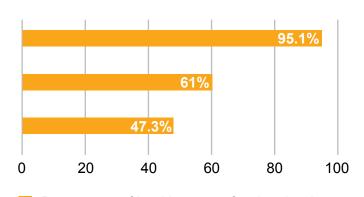
Percentage of healthcare professionals who agree

#### Scope of services

Promote child-friendly environment

Connect with the community

Provide training and consultation



Percentage of healthcare professionals who agree

#### Views of Healthcare Professionals

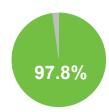


#### About paediatric patients





Most hospitalized children have difficulty coping with treatment of illnesses, they do not co-operate and have negative emotions.



Play is an important component of psychological interventions to help children cope with the stress of medical procedures and hospitalization.



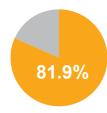
Play interventions can enhance the co-cooperativeness of paediatric patients, facilitate the implementation of daily routine, medical procedures and caring plan.

#### **About hospital play**

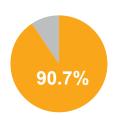




Hospital play interventions are important.



Hospital play interventions provided by hospital play specialists for paediatric patients can alleviate their burden.



Hospital play specialists' update on the progress through play intervention facilitates healthcare professionals to adjust the medical plan.



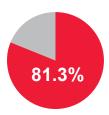
Hospital play specialists in hospitals are important.



Close collaboration between healthcare professionals and hospital play specialists strengthen the holistic care of patients.

#### About the implementation of hospital play

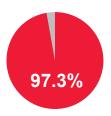




Implementation of play interventions should become standard practice for hospitalized children.



Implementing play in hospitals requires additional workforce and resources.



Implementation of hospital play requires the support from the Hospital Authority.

### **Key Points of One-on-one Interviews**



Participating children and their families said that hospitalization is stressful, children fear unfamiliar medical procedures, and parents are confused about complicated medical procedures. Hospital play specialists help to address these issues and, hence, to alleviate anxiety. Using toys and medical tools, they explain complicated procedures of an intravenous injection, wound cleansing, and Magnetic Resonance Imaging in an easy-to-understand way to help hospitalized children to prepare psychologically for the procedures, alleviate fear and negative emotions. This facilitates the smooth implementation of procedures and treatment and improves the overall success rate of the medical intervention.

When we knew that our child needed a biopsy of the kidney, we were very confused, and the child was very afraid. Fortunately, hospital play specialists continuously comforted us, using stuffed dolls to demonstrate the surgical procedures.

Parent



Hospital play specialists explain to paediatric patients every medical procedure and rehearse the procedure repeatedly using the stuffed dolls. This helps alleviate the children's fears so that medical procedures can be carried out smoothly.



#### **Bridging service gaps**





Facing unfamiliar hospital environment and being separated from families for a long time, hospitalized children become increasingly fearful and anxious. Though healthcare professionals care about children's psychological status and their emotions, most of them said that because of extremely busy clinical settings and workforce shortages, they do not have the time and resources to fulfil the play needs of hospitalized children or address their emotional and psychological needs.

Hospital play specialists can fill up the service gaps. They are capable of paying attention and caring for the psychological well-being of hospitalized children. Apart from accompanying paediatric patients and caring for them to build up a sense of familiarity and security, hospital play specialists guide paediatric patients to express their emotions, alleviate fears through play. Moreover, paediatric patients can also explore methods of coping with stress and relaxing themselves. Hospital play specialists also tailor-make fun play activities to rehearse different medical procedures, which enables paediatric patients to enhance their ability of and boost confidence in fighting diseases.

Child

Paediatric patients have psychological needs apart from physical needs. Knowing that nurses are so busy with their work, I understand that they cannot take care of my emotions. However, hospital play specialists can do so.



Healthcare professionals need to focus on treatment of illnesses and don't have much time to care about the mental health of patients. Hospital play specialists can help us a lot in this regard.

# Connecting with healthcare professionals and building trust relationships during hospitalization







Some healthcare professionals have expressed in interviews that hospital play specialists can serve a significant role in facilitating communication between healthcare professionals and hospitalized children. As hospitalized children find medical procedures irritable and scary, they are leery of healthcare professionals. Hence, they feel reluctant to tell healthcare professionals their true feelings, their thoughts and even their health conditions.

Hospital play specialists are good at communicating with paediatric patients through play. They can even build up trust with hospitalized children by spending time together. The children may feel free to express their feelings and inner thoughts to hospital play specialists. Hence, hospital play specialists have a better understanding of children's inner world and thoughts, becoming a bridge connecting healthcare professionals and paediatric patients and their families. Having a better understanding of what hospitalized children think through hospital play specialists, healthcare professionals can arrange appropriate support to facilitate smooth and effective implementation of treatment.

Doctor



Children may not have the courage to tell healthcare professionals about their fears and concerns. Sometimes they even do not tell us whether they have taken medication or not. But they will share with hospital play specialists about that. This is a good channel for children to express their feelings and thoughts and facilitates us to help the children.

Nurse



Children are leery of nurses. But they regard hospital play specialists trustworthy. This is good as hospital play specialists can help us to communicate with children and children will find their words more acceptable.

Being in the hospital is very boring for children. Hospital play specialists brought toys and crafts to play with my daughter. They also accompanied and talked with her. They have become friends. My daughter often asks when the hospital play specialists will come.



#### Recognition and professionalism of hospital play specialists





The vast majority of healthcare professionals interviewed agreed that hospital play should become a regular activity for hospitalized children. Given enough resources and manpower, hospital play service should be set up and at least one hospital play specialist should be on duty in every paediatric ward. This is because the role of hospital play specialists is very different from other healthcare professionals, as they spend more time and energy taking care of psychological well-being of hospitalized children.

Healthcare professionals also recognize hospital play specialists as an important part of the whole medical team. They can work with healthcare professionals to improve children's overall experiences of being hospitalized and receiving treatment. In this regard, healthcare professionals suggest that hospitals should put in more resources into promoting hospital play services and even employing hospital play specialists.

However, hospital play services in Hong Kong hospitals are provided on a voluntary basis. Hospital play specialists are not employees of the Hospital Authority , and are not within the medical system. They provide services as a volunteer or honorary staff and their services are usually referred by healthcare professionals. The process of providing services is very time-consuming and ineffective. On the contrary, hospital play specialists abroad are specialized healthcare professionals. Some doctors said in the interviews that hospital play specialists should be formalized to raise the overall standards and efficiency of medical services.

Though most of the interviewees said they had not known hospital play services or hospital play specialists before using relevant services, they all recognized the professionalism of hospital play specialists and hoped that the services would be expanded to benefit more children.

Doctor



Overseas children's hospitals employ specialized hospital play specialists. In this regard, Hong Kong seems a bit backward.

Children are future pillars of our society. We should attach great importance to children's physical and psychological developments.

Parent



#### Future development



The findings show that healthcare professionals interviewed highly regard hospital play services, and that hospital play specialists are regarded as indispensable company for children being hospitalized. We hope that hospital play services continue to gain recognition and support from different sectors of the society, and that there will be a hospital play service in every paediatric ward in Hong Kong so that every paediatric patient can still play even when they are sick!



# A Miraculous Prescription of Play

Imagine a four-year-old boy who was born with a chronic illness and then suffered from deteriorating medical conditions later in his life. How can he handle such turmoil? Optimistic by nature, complemented by the miraculous prescription by hospital play specialists, the boy in this story was able to weather the storms in his journey of fighting the illness.

#### Hospital play starts with stickers



Affected by a chromosome disease and craniosynostosis, Pipi (alias) has congenital abnormal development in his brain structure. As such, Pipi loses the ability to breathe on some occasions. Before the age of two, Pipi underwent four surgeries at the Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital (PYNEH) and the ward has become his home since then. Referred by the doctors, hospital play specialists have developed a relationship with Pipi since 2020.



Pasting pretty stickers on Pipi's face to create some positive feelings.

Pipi had to use a nasal cannula to instill adequate oxygen through nose trills to ensure that his organs would not malfunction due to inadequate oxygen. However, young Pipi was not used to using the nasal cannula. He resisted using it and whined about it. After assessing the situation, hospital play specialists found out what Pipi objected to was an itchy feeling caused by attaching the nasal cannula on his face. Hence, the hospital play specialists used stickers as a prescription. Firstly, they pasted cute stickers on Pipi's arm to let his skin get used to the feeling of being stuck on. When attaching the nasal cannula to Pipi's face, hospital play specialists used pretty stickers and kept encouraging and praising Pipi. After several attempts, Pipi overcame the discomfort and even developed a positive impression about using the nasal cannula. He has become very cooperative since then.

In early 2022, Pipi's conditions were stabilized and he was transferred to the Caritas Medical Centre (CMC), where he continued to receive treatment and rehabilitation. He could even leave the hospital for school every day. As referred by the healthcare professionals of the CMC, Pipi met the hospital play specialists again. A play session was kickstarted once a week to provide Pipi with age-appropriate stimuli to facilitate his growth. On festivals and birthdays, the hospital play specialists organized celebratory activities for Pipi and other hospitalized paediatric patients in the ward to ensure that they could experience the festive vibes even whilst in the hospital.



#### "Ambush" by the illness

In June 2024, Pipi suffered from severe seizures, and his health conditions deteriorated. He was transferred to the Paediatric Intensive Care Unit of the Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH) to receive treatment. Pipi could not breathe and was unresponsive. Hospital play specialists provided emotional support to Pipi and his family immediately and accompanied them through the tough times. Fortunately, Pipi got through the trial and returned to CMC in late June to receive rehabilitation. However, since Pipi suffered from a severe blow to his health, his health conditions worsened gravely. Not only did he lose his sight, but he also lost the ability to speak.

The hospital play specialists knew very well that Pipi used to be active and curious about everything..... It really made them sad when they met him after he suffered from a great setback in health. With great faith in hospital play, the hospital play specialists pulled together to assess Pipi's health conditions and formulate a hospital play plan tailored to his preferences and rehabilitative needs. They hoped to accelerate Pipi's recovery so that he might be happy again.

#### The assessment of Pipi's condition by hospital play specialists



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	Before the illness attack (6 June)	After the illness attack (28 June)
Ventilator support	Only when necessary	All day
Schedule	During 8am-4pm, leave the hospital and study at school	Bed-ridden
Language	Speak clearly, can ask questions, greet people, organize sentences of 4 to 6 words	Cannot speak
Motor	Can walk slowly and claw	Weak limbs, cannot move limbs as instructed
Visual	Normal	Lost most of the sight, has only weak responses to light
Social	Like to communicate with people, enjoy group activities	Can only communicate with people by smiling and whining
Emotional	Need company, but can stay at the ward alone and remain emotionally stable	Need long-time company, whine if feeling insecure and lonely, and breathing may sometimes suspend
Play	Favour gross motor play, can explore and control toys on his own and express needs for play	Express interest in play with smiles, showing signs of tiredness after playing for 5 minutes







#### **Designated plan**

After a discussion with Pipi's doctors, hospital play specialists came up with multiple objectives:

- / Enhance Pipi's responses to external stimuli through play
- Guide Pipi to remaster language ability through play
- Provide emotional support to Pipi through play and enable him to adapt to his body conditions gradually



#### Hospital play plan



#### √ Adequate play stimuli

Hospital play specialists designed one play session every day instead of the developmental play once every week in the past. The duration of every play session varied depending on Pipi's health conditions. This regular arrangement ensures that Pipi has stimuli from play every day. As Pipi has to lie in bed for a long time in darkness due to his loss of sight, this arrangement also enables him to develop a sense of security and discipline.



#### ✓ Cater for favourites and developmental needs

Hospital play specialists have known Pipi since he was very young and are quite familiar with his preferences. Hence, they incorporated Pipi's favourite musical elements in the play to spark his motivation. Pipi was encouraged to move his limbs to the melodies and rhythms, and he also explored musical instruments and songs through touching and hearing them. Imaginary play was also added to stimulate his senses to cater for his developmental stages.



#### √ Stick to play objectives

In order to stimulate Pipi to make sounds and speak, hospital play specialists specially slowed down the pace of play and speaking. This allowed Pipi to listen to what hospital play specialists said clearly and resemble every speaking sound. Hospital play specialists also paused between sentences to encourage Pipi to respond to and sometimes repeat what had been said. In addition, the materials used in play were closely related to everyday life, such as macaroni, sticky tape, shell, paper, key, etc. As such, Pipi was able to keep connecting with the world and enhance his reaction to different stimuli.



#### √ Solicit healthcare professionals' support

To ensure that Pipi kept playing during weekends and spare time, healthcare professionals were invited to play with him. A play box and a board showing Pipi's information had been set up in front of his bed to enhance healthcare professionals' understanding of Pipi and encourage them to explore and play with him.

#### Gradual progress made by Pipi

With a tailor-made hospital play plan, Pipi made gradual progress day by day. Subsequently, he could resume his ability to speak, proving that the rehabilitative effects of play are amazing!



On the 1st day of returning to CMC, Pipi had the first session of play. Though Pipi was tired and unresponsive to the things shown to him, he still smiled when hearing the hospital play specialists making sounds resembling different animals without being able to see them. When hearing favourite animal sounds, Pipi even nodded to implicate his wish to continue to play.

During the 8th session, Pipi's physical and mental conditions had improved significantly. He even twisted his waist and smiled a great deal to express his excitement about play. The hospital play specialists led some healthcare professionals to shake the rattles and sing while playing the guitar. Though Pipi was unable to make sounds, he tried his best to open his mouth and move his tongue, expressing his enthusiasm toward music and play.

The 15<sup>th</sup> session was imaginary play. During the session, the hospital play specialists played sounds of sea waves washing onshore. They also provided shells for Pipi to touch, led him to imagine being at the beach, and to whisper in his ears. Unexpectedly, Pipi imitated the hospital play specialists to make the sound of "shells", which was the first time he made sounds after the attack of his illness. The hospital play specialists could not help praising him repeatedly. Pipi nodded and smiled, trying to mouth the word of "good".

Pipi continued to make significant progress! During the 26th session, the hospital play specialists engaged him in singing. They sang the first part of the lyrics, then hinted Pipi to sing the latter half. They greatly synchronized when singing together, even though Pipi's voice was crispy.





Good singing partners



Pipi made sounds for the first time since he suffered from an illness attack.

Pipi liked to showcase his talent in music. Whenever the healthcare professionals walked past his bed, they shouted: "sing for us!" After singing out loud, Pipi would receive great applause no matter how he performed. Some doctors were amazed that Pipi not only imitated what other people spoke, he could also control what he spoke and sang by himself.

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Pipi could not go to school due to his physical conditions, so it was inevitable for Pipi to feel lonely being bed-ridden and alone. Sometimes, he even cried non-stop to the extent that his breathing was suspended. To pacify him and ensure that he received enough stimuli, the hospital play specialists began recording stories starting from the 33<sup>rd</sup> session, and played them through a speaker, which was put at his bedside.

The hospital play specialists deliberately chose stories related to expressing emotions to guide Pipi to express his feelings through words and reduce his whining. Interactive play was included in the stories to stimulate Pipi to think while listening to them. According to the healthcare professionals, Pipi listened to the stories attentively while they were being played. He also answered the questions and completed the tasks required in the stories and his emotions stabilized subsequently.



A responsible helper offers assistance through rubbing flour to making ball-shaped glutinous rice ball.



Pipi's face shows satisfaction after making glutinous rice ball.

Apart from regular play sessions conducted every day, the hospital play specialists adjusted the play activities according to different festivals. This enabled Pipi to participate in festivities even whilst in hospital. During the 50<sup>th</sup> session, the hospital play specialists made glutinous rice ball with Pipi to celebrate the mid-Autumn Festival. Though he could not eat the glutinous rice ball, he had much fun when making them.

Pipi liked pressing the skin of glutinous rice ball and put the fillings inside. He said repeatedly: "let me help! let me help!" Though he could not see, he tried his best to put the fillings in the middle of the skin. The nurses and doctors cheered for him. A nurse joked that Pipi should share the glutinous rice ball, and Pipi responded excitedly: "sure, this glutinous rice ball is made by me for you." The festive vibe warmed the hearts of Pipi and the healthcare professionals.



With lanterns, mooncakes, and hand-made glutinous rice ball, Pipi celebrates Mid-Autumn Festival with the healthcare professionals who love him very much.



#### Sharing from the bottom of hearts

Originally, Pipi was active, talkative, and a sweetheart. After he suffered severe epilepsy, his limbs became weak, and he became less responsive after he received the treatment. Fortunately, hospital play specialists played, sang and shared stories with him. Since then, Pipi became more responsive, and his limbs also became more active. Moreover, he was able to express himself and he chose his favourite songs and stories, even sang the "childhood" song with other people. This is miraculous. I have never imagined that play has such a great effect on paediatric patients!

I sincerely thank the hospital play specialists for bringing happiness to hospitalized children, helping the children to alleviate their fear, and nurturing a positive attitude toward fighting their illnesses.

Ward Manager of Developmental Disabilities Unit of the Caritas Medical Centre Carol Lo Chui-han

I am grateful to hospital play specialists.

Whether Pipi was in the PYNEH, PMH or CMC, they accompanied Pipi to grow and guided him to make progress step by step. They also accompanied the family to go through ups and downs. The playing moments constituted happy memories for us. Every time we visit Pipi, we hear that Pipi calls out loud the names of hospital play specialists.

I believe that Pipi enjoys every play moment, and play lightens up the life of hospitalized children.

Pĭpĭ's famĭly

I am happy to witness Pipi's making progress in speaking and responding to stimuli.

Hospital play specialists pour in their hearts when singing with Pipi, telling him stories and playing with him. This facilitated Pipi to receive different stimuli for his different senses. I also thank the hospital play specialists for preparing many playful toys for healthcare professionals to play with Pipi.

I wish that Pipi can continue making progress!



Medical Officer of the Caritas Medical Centre Dr Wai Chi-san

We are grateful to Pipi for letting us witness such a miraculous journey!

As a hospital play specialist, I know deep in my heart that play is children's nature and language. But I treasure most the testimony about how play becomes a life-changing prescription. I also find the enthusiastic support from healthcare professionals and their understanding of the importance of play most touching.

I sincerely hope that Pipi's childhood fits the description of the lyrics of the song "childhood": jumping and laughing.

May Pipi lead an active, happy and joyful life in the days ahead.



Hospital Play Specialist Julie

#### Craniosynostosis

New-born babies have rapid brain development. During the first year after birth, the volume of the brain can increase by threefold. As such, more space is needed for the growth of the brain, the skull will not close until children come of age. Children suffering from craniosynostosis have premature closure of skulls, leading to adverse effects on skull structure and brain development. Paediatric patients suffering from severe craniosynostosis need surgeries to correct the shape of their skulls. The illness is usually heritable, and it is difficult to discover it through examinations. It is easier to diagnose when babies are two to three months old after birth. The symptoms include:

- High intracranial pressure
- Delayed development, which affects intellectual and physical growth
- Difficulties in eating

- Respiratory problems, some patients need the surgery of tracheostomy to improve the condition
- Deformed face, e.g. goggle-eye or sunken palate





# Gaining overseas experiences to elevate local service standards

Since 1994, Playright has introduced the western concept of taking care of paediatric patients through play and commenced the hospital play service in Hong Kong. Over the years, we have kept close connections with relevant organizations around the world to gain overseas experiences and to master the latest developments.

Recently, the hospital play team embarked on trips to the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada, Australia and New Zealand to understand the implementation of hospital play in different hospitals.



#### **Eye-opening trips**

The three overseas trips were packed and enriching. The respective host organizations welcomed us and shared in detail the implementation of hospital play. Our team members were greatly enlightened and inspired by the various systems behind the implementation of hospital play, to explore different aspects including hospital environments, format of services, daily operation, practical skills, intervention methods, modes of training, direction of development and hospital play tools. Here are some specific examples:

- A simulation room is set near the regular Magnetic Resonance Imaging room. The facilities are the same except that the equipment is not magnetic. The simulation room facilitates paediatric patients to rehearse before undergoing examinations and treatment.
- Overseas counterparts have been stationed in emergency departments for a long time, working with healthcare professionals in the frontline to provide support to paediatric patients.
- Some hospitals have a sensory garden with fragrance and artistic installations. We also saw an aquarium, a zoo, and cinema with bean bags as chairs, a game room with access for hospital beds, a gym room, and a game booth for teenagers.
- Some hospitals set up cartoon lift signages that are taller than a person, a corridor installed with sensory animal pictures, a playground behind the doors of the ward, a waiting area with the theme of tropical rainforest, and a slide that allows children to play freely.
- A palliative room was decorated just like a living room with the institute having carefully placed all medical equipment inside closets.

Regarding the system of hospital play, quite a few hospitals play specialists are directly employed by the hospitals. This is different from the local system in which the service is run by a non-government organization on a fundraised basis. Some hospitals arrange hospital play specialists to serve paediatric patients in a specialized department where music therapists and art therapists can also be found. This is also different from the local hospital play service which involves different wards, and is coordinated by hospital play specialists.



We were grateful for the hospitality of the hospitals, including the Kidz First Children Hospital.

At the Monash Children's Hospital, the Playright team is led by our counterparts to visit the Magnetic Resonance Imaging room.



At the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, we met with Ms Lindsay HEERING (second from left), former President of the Association of Child Life Professionals.



Overseas counterparts apply lipstick of different flavours on the anaesthetic mask to facilitate paediatric patients to get used to wearing them. The team coming from afar certainly did not miss the chance of trying.

#### Swallow play inspired by overseas visits

The hospital play specialists participating in the trips shared what they had learned and seen with their colleagues when they returned to Hong Kong, including a game of swallowing pills.

To help children understand the mechanism of swallowing, overseas counterparts provide small-to-big sized candies for children to swallow one by one, thus greatly boosting their confidence in taking pills.

Hospital play specialists designed a new play plan of swallowing pills by incorporating the overseas approach and taking local paediatric patients' needs into consideration. Apart from visualizing the steps, the plan also provides tools for children to touch to enhance their understanding of swallowing pills.

Paediatric patients may find it irritable to swallow pills. Overseas hospital play specialists have designed candy boxes of different sizes to let children challenge each of them.



1 Using a telescopic tube to simulate the esophagus, the flexible and retractable characteristics demonstrate that the esophagus can accommodate food of different sizes, including pills.



Comparing the esophagus to a water slide: by drinking water or keeping the esophagus moist, anything in the esophagus will slide down.



3 Likening pills to children playing on the water slide: when the pills are taken to the water slide (i.e. the root of tongue near the throat), they will slide down.



4 Putting pills and adding water, let the pills play the water slide.



For hesitant and nervous paediatric patients, the hospital play specialists guide them to make food with clay, linking eating normal food to swallowing pills. When children find that Chinese dim sum, pizza and cake that are bigger than pills can be swallowed, taking pills becomes more acceptable. When they put the clay-made food into the telescopic tube and repeatedly experience and rehearse the steps of swallowing food, the children will build up their confidence in taking pills.



After playing, the paediatric patients are no longer afraid and resistant. Instead, they successfully swallow the pills and even wear a smile. When they try swallowing pills at home, the process is still smooth. This further ascertains the positive effects of hospital play on children in any parts of the world.



# Our heartfelt gratitude 😉



- Thanks to the donation of HK\$32,630,000 from the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, we have been implementing the 66 months "Jockey Club Playright P.L.A.Y. for Child Health" project from February 2019 to July 2024.
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  - Toys Hola Limited generously made a donation of HK\$154,800
  - Arts Plus generously made a donation of HK\$85,000
  - China Base Holdings Limited generously made a donation of HK\$55,000
  - With the matching grant from the Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged
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